

# Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program

## What is the community challenge?

As opportunities for college graduates have grown in recent decades, prospects for young adults without postsecondary credentials have steadily worsened. With few chances at well-paying jobs, many give up on school and withdraw from the labor force. Short spells of withdrawal often lead to long-term disconnection and life-long disadvantages. The societal costs are high: lack of opportunity is associated with higher rates of crime, substance abuse, health problems, single parenting, and economic dependency.

### Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Year Up

Subgrantee: Year Up

Intermediary: New Profit and Venture Philanthropy Partners

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Urban young adults aged 18-24 with a high school diploma or equivalent

Community Served: Atlanta, Bay Area, Boston, Chicago, National Capital Region, New York City, Providence, Seattle

## What is the promising solution?

Year Up is a national sectoral training program for urban young adults aged 18-24 with a high school diploma or equivalent. Operated by an organization of the same name, Year Up provides six months of full-time customized training in the IT and financial service sectors followed by six month internships at major firms. The full-time program provides extensive supports—including weekly stipends—and puts a heavy emphasis on professional, as well as technical skills. Employer payments to Year Up for interns financed 59 percent of the program's \$28,290 per participant cost.

## What was the purpose of evaluation?

Year Up is one of nine programs Abt Associates is evaluating in the federally sponsored Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) evaluation. Each of the nine evaluations includes implementation and impact studies. For the Year Up study, the evaluation team randomly assigned 2,544 young adults to treatment (1,669) and control (875) groups. This report covers the program's implementation and early impacts, with follow-up centering on 1.5 years and extending to 3 years for some outcomes.

## What did the evaluation find?

Findings show that Year Up implemented its program with high fidelity to its design and substantially increased the training, support, and employment services young adults received. It had a large positive impact on the confirmatory outcome selected for this report—average quarterly earnings in the sixth and seventh quarters after random assignment. Average quarterly earnings were \$1,895 higher for the treatment group (\$5,454) than for the control group (\$3,559)—a 53 percent impact. Impacts diminished but remained large (about 40 percent) over the following year. As documented briefly in this summary and at more length in

Chapter 1, these earnings impacts are the largest reported to date for workforce programs tested using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design.

## Notes on the evaluation

Results from field research and quantitative analyses of program data show that the eight local Year Up offices fully implemented most components of the program. This is a substantial achievement, given the number and complexity of program elements, varying local environments, and need for coordination across many services.

### How is Year Up using the evaluation findings to improve?

While answering one set of questions about Year Up's implementation and early impacts, this report also raises many questions for future research. Future data collection and analysis for the PACE evaluation will address some of these questions, whereas others will require separate studies.

One series of questions for the ongoing PACE evaluation concerns how Year Up's impacts will evolve over the longer-term:

- Do impacts on earnings persist or fade?
- To what extent do the program's positive initial impacts on employment in entry-level career-track jobs position young adults to continue along career pathways in occupations Year Up targets?
- What role does college play in participants' career pathways, compared to young adults who did not go to Year Up? At what rates do Year Up graduates return to school and earn college credentials in the longer-term?
- To what degree does career progress affect well-being in other domains?

Future reports on program impacts covering up to six years of follow-up will address these and other questions.

#### Evaluation At-a-Glance

**Evaluation Design:** Randomized controlled trial (RCT) Between-Groups

**Study Population:** Urban young adults aged 18-24 with a high school diploma or equivalent

**Independent Evaluator:** Abt Associates

**This Evaluation's Level of Evidence\*:** Strong

\*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

**To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.**

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.